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EMERGING TRENDS OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Women have been deprived from the structures of countries that determine legislative and political priorities. In the past years, Africa has experienced an increase in political representation of female. This paper emphasizes on the emerging trends that have been observed in women political involvement in Africa. These changes have resulted to the potential for the rise of women's entry to political post. The present trends of women involvement in politics have been successful by an amalgamation of various factors. This paper looked at the factors that have resulted to the optimistic changes in the political involvement of women. Africa Women have made tremendous trends in political involvement globally although a huge gap still exists. Women have a huge role before they can be recognized as full partners and equals to their male counterparts. The challenges to Women involvement will also be evaluated and lastly suggest recommendations to enhance women's empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, women have been exempted from the structures of state that determines and decides on legislative and political priorities in Africa. In the present years, Africa has experienced swift rise in political representation of female as examined to the minimal rates that occurred in the 1960s.

Involvement of women in the process of decision making has greatly been positioned at the heart of the global goal. Necessary developments in African governance which have been defeated by the ever rising democracy consolidation in the globe have resulted to the rise in women's involvement in politics. Various successes have been witnessed in the advancement of women's empowerment, gender equality and various projects, policies as well as programs are in place to ensure women's empowerment and gender equality. These trends have engendered the capability for rising women's entry to political power. The current trends in Women's political involvement have been assisted by an amalgamation of various factors. Changes transpiring in the African region have optimistically conferred a greater advantage for more women to take up leadership positions. Regardless of the fact that, Africa Women have made tremendous trends in political involvement globally; a very large gap is still in occurrence. Women have a huge role before they can be observed as full partners and equals to their male counterparts. This paper tries to emphasize the new trends in the political involvement of Women's in Africa. The factors that have simplified these trends will be evaluated. The Barriers to Political involvement of Women's will also be evaluated and lastly suggests various recommendations to enhance women's involvement.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

The new trends in the political involvement of Women in Africa have been shown by the rise in the statistics of women in parliament. Women involvement in politics is essential for enhanced governance in Africa.

World Classification									
Rank	Nation	Election	Women	Seats	% Women	Elections	Women	Seats	% Women
1	Rwanda	92008	45	80	56.3%	92011	10	26	38.5%
2	Andorra	42011	14	28	50.0%	-	-	-	-
3	Cuba	22013	299	612	48.90%	-	-	-	-
4	Sweden	92010	156	349	44.70%	-	-	-	-
5	Seychelles	92011	14	32	43.80%	-	-	-	-
6	Senegal	72012	64	150	42.70%	-	-	-	-
7	Finland	42011	85	200	42.50%	-	-	-	-
8	South Africa	42009	169	400	42.30%	42009	17	53	32.10%
9	Nicaragua	112011	37	92	40.20%	-	-	-	-
10	Iceland	42013	25	63	39.70%	-	-	-	-
11	Norway	92009	67	169	39.60%	-	-	-	-
12	Mozambique	102009	98	250	39.20%	-	-	-	-
13	Denmark	92011	70	179	39.10%	-	-	-	-
14	Ecuador	92013	53	137	38.70%	-	-	-	-
15	Netherlands	92012	58	150	38.70%	52011	27	75	36.00%
16	Costa Rica	92010	22	57	38.60%	-	-	-	-
17	Timor. Leste	72012	25	65	38.50%	-	-	-	-
18	Belgium	62010	57	150	38.00%	62010	29	71	40.80%
19	Argentina	102011	96	257	37.40%	102011	28	72	38.90%
20	Mexico	72012	184	500	36.80%	72012	42	128	32.80%
21	Spain	112011	126	350	36.00%	112011	91	266	34.20%
22	Tanzania	102010	126	350	36.00%	-	-	-	-
23	Uganda	22011	135	386	35.00	-	-	-	-
24	Angola	82012	75	220	34.10%	-	-	-	-

Source: Inter-parliamentary Union (2013)

FACTORS THAT HAVE IMPROVED WOMEN'S MAXIMIZED POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

There is no sole factor that has resulted to the optimistic trends in political participation of Women's. Various factors have worked collectively in ensuring women's political participation in Africa. This paper will concentrate on factors such as: Quota Systems, the rise in Women's movements, National and Global Agreements, Financing from International Agencies including Commitments and Conventions amongst others.

The Quota System

The optimistic trends in political involvement of Women in Africa have also been abetted by the rising number of Nations that have launched the Quota Systems for Women's representation in local government and in parliament.

Multiparty Systems

More so, the shift and democratization towards multiparty systems in African nations have greatly triggered the rise of political involvement of Women's. The Multiparty system has formed the different political parties to press for various ranging ideas which entail women's increased political involvement. An essential element of the shift towards the multiparty system has been the formation of various political parties by various women. The call for the formation of political parties have been triggered by the lack of willingness of existing male regulated political parties to set off political representation of women. In political parties set up by men; the role of women has majorly been through the women's wings. Evidence from different political parties has indicated that the women's wings are a relative toothless branch which majorly centers on ensuring that women are voters.

The Increase of Women Movement Groups

The official declaration of Women's Movement groups in Africa is a major factor which has resulted to a rise in the statistics of women participation in politics. These groups have been of great essence as they have ensured the political leadership of Women. The groups have been significant as they have pushed for constitutional and legislative transformations carried out as a result of the influence of the various Women's Movement Groups.

International Conventions and Agreements

A collection of international conventions and agreements have been significant in ensuring that women take up political positions as well as influence policy making of various African Nations. However, the propelling forces for these changes have been international norms and pressures and have provided an included impetus to these present demands. This emphasizes the role that has been carried out by the international conventions and agreements in ensuring internal motives from different angles. These Conventions have resulted to the forefront subject matter of Gender Rights and Equality which entail political involvement. This has gone interwoven with the provision of donor finance to back up women in politics. The accessibility of donor finance channeled through local and international Non Governmental agencies, embassies, religious bodies and international foundations has played a major role in triggering the increase of national level organizations that ensures political activities of women.

Civil Society

Political Participation of Women has also been improved by the rising drive from the civil society in ensuring women's involvement in leadership. The civil society has also played a major role in ensuring women's involvement in election and politics. This entails supporting policies that will maximize spaces for women's participation, ensuring that women vote and serve as observers in elections, encouraging women to stand as candidate and run for a campaign. The civil society has been very essential in promoting awareness of women's rights.

Economic Empowerment and Educational Opportunities

The improvement in Educational opportunities for Women and girls has influenced the involvement of women in politics. An enhancement in Girl's Education in most African Nations has resulted to the emergence of an increasing group of highly skilled women who are in a position to outperform with men for political position in different levels. Education is a major predictor of political involvement. Education has asserted various women to form political parties as well as join political parties so as to enable them to involve in political activities. Research Evidence has indicated that Education is one of the major necessary paths for ensuring that women speak out.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY WOMEN IN POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Regardless of the above described optimistic trends; there are some major issues which must be figured out for women to completely involve in decision making in respect to the structures of power. The issue of women's visibility and representation in leadership as well as in decision process remains a serious gap. The election of female president in some African Nations has not translated into a Maximized parliamentary Representation (Cole, 2011). This indicates that there are some gaps that must be handled as women in politics continually experience various challenges. The huge number of women in various offices have not completely transformed into resource and legislative gains. In respect to this; while quotas are essential in tackling the exemption of women from the public political condition, women has not completely gained from this system. In most African nations; women in the reserved allocations as a result of the quota systems have been like cheese pieces as they have been moved by men. Therefore; there are various issues which must be changed or improved for women who completely gain from the occurring trends in their political involvement. These entail revolutionizing religious and patriarchal beliefs as well as intensifying enhancement programmes and capacity building to boost women involvement in politics.

Religious and Patriarchal beliefs in Politics

The rising rate of women's availability in governance institutions has not primarily had serious transformative effect on the subtle patriarchal practices and cultures in Africa. Progression in opening locations for the political involvement of women's in Africa has not move along with the fall of the patriarchal power structures. As a result of the effect of patriarchy; men consistently at the helm of the state of affairs as well as exclusively makes all the decision even if the issues focuses on women. The few African Women who have gathered enough strength and courage to speak have gained a very less respect and attention. According to Tripp (1999; 6);

“The restrictive cultural behavior against women's participation persists among women and men. These are depicted in female politician media coverage, voting patterns as well as blatant motives to suppress women's assertion of their political ideologies and rights.

The political sphere is majorly andocentric making it challenging for women to actively involve in politics. Kellow emphasized that “the demands of household and family responsibilities usually prelude women from even considering involving in politics. This is reinforced by the women's fright of rejection or probably violence from family and husband if they intend to involve in politics” (2010). The uneven categorization of jobs, occupations as well as tasks in society environments makes it challenging for women to completely involve in politics.

Religious is a major instruments which has been applied by women in continuous servitude under representation in decision process and domination. The values and beliefs of major religions are patriarchal and sexist in character and structure as they continually intend to suppress women.

Embarking on Revitalizing Women's Abilities

The Non Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, Government and other Stakeholders should embark on enhancement initiatives and a vibrant capacity building for various women candidates. This should be interwoven with initiatives towards the provisions of a partnership or around a significant mass of competent and vibrant women in politics. In Africa; Civil Society Organizations continually play a significant role in enhancing women's involvements in elections and politics. Women low perspective of themselves makes it challenging for them to compete with men, voting for other women as well as involving in decision making process. According to the Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), “Collaboration with the Media, Non Government Organization (NGOs) and Traditional leaders raise awareness on the rights of girls and women through the necessary messages that would have the influence of accelerating changes in practices and attitudes that presently affect pessimistically their improvement in the society” (2009). This should majorly be carried out in Rural Africa where majority of women are situated and majority of these women are majorly

knowledgeable of the laws that enhances their legal freedom. The capacity initiative Building is very essential in ensuring that the rural women involve in politics. Rural Women are not fully aware of the basic knowledge of the role and the systems of Governments. And therefore; it restricts them from being aware of their rights as well as how to claim them and from valuing how much elections can assist them to use the opportunities that will be presented.

Handling Media Coverage in Politics

As previously noted in Women political involvement in enhancing Africa; tremendous challenges remain in the manner of ensuring that the electoral process is subverted by political violence so as to ensure that women freely involve in the election processes. Female candidates and their supporters have been confronted routinely with gender centered intimidation that results to a harsh climate as well as triggering some women to leave their campaigns. It is of greatest importance to condense the political violence after and before elections so that women can wholly involve in elections. According to the “Economic Commission of Africa (ECA); Africa Governments should “tackle violence through capacity improvement of enforcement authorities, sustained reformation of the law, public awareness initiatives (inclusive objectives to change and reverse the culture of silence pertaining violence), the impunity with which such crimes are carried out as well as its relegation as a private affair” (2009). Therefore; violence against women after and during elections should be tackled so as to ensure that women partake in politics safely. Carillo (2009) confirmed that even though women have advanced in their amount and qualify in political involvement in more or few very nations; women are still encountering gender based violence and harassment in politics and they are usually victims of violence and harassment. This has compelled some women in Africa to renounce their roles and positions thereby leaving men in the corridor of power. The transformation of the security sector is vital in reshaping the gendered relations that are currently attributed to African Security Systems and Institutions.

Media Coverage of Women in Politics

Media has a major effect in the life of human. Media serves as both a protagonist and executor in ensuring equal involvement of women and men in politics. Media can be a serious accomplice or danger to gender centered discrimination by displaying Stereotypical Sensational images of women (Anand). From the reports; it has been noted that there is the essence for a lot of task to be carried out for women politicians to be reported more regularly and in an optimistic manner; minimal changes has been experienced till present (Tsami, 2012). This is essential as a result of the fact that “Media Coverage is a major lifeblood of politics since it shapes the perspectives that form the reality in which political action is centered. Media do more than portray the political environment; they are the political environment” (Grabbler, 2011). This emphasizes that there is the need for an optimistic coverage of women in politics as media plays a significant role in reforming the political environ of any Nation. Efforts should be carried out so as to ensure that Media creates a balanced coverage that empowers and emboldens women. The effect of visual media is a very strong and vibrant tool for communicating images and ideas is significant. According to Matekaire:

The Media plays a major role in evaluating how women in decision making and politics are perceived and viewed by society as a whole. The media does not solely play a significant role in shaping the value of the society but it also depicts these values--- the media is an informer, a chronicler of events, an educator, a tool for societal change and also a transformative tool. Women in politics play a significant role towards ensuring the democratic governance of the Nation and thus their values to this processes need to be evaluated in the necessary context by the media (2003).

Campaigning Resources and Strategies

Restricted Knowledge of Policy Mechanisms and Political Systems prohibit Women's capability to plan a successful campaign platform. According to Kellow (2010) “Political inexperience makes it more difficult for women to have access to the existing and thriving power structures as well as been aware of how to influence them”. Therefore; there is the essence to back up women in acquiring the skill in public speaking, fundraising and campaign skills which are significant to run a successful campaign and gain public support. Women should be aided with financial resources so as to run a successful constituency campaign and to compete with established men in communities they dwell in.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that there has been progress in ensuring women's involvement in politics in Africa. The present trend in the involvement of women shows an optimistic enhancement in the involvement of women in Africa. This is an optimistic enhancement in the involvement of women in Africa.

This is an optimistic development giving that the rising number of women in politics is a tactical ways of abolishing the structural background of inequality between women and men. The availability of women in the political offices will enable women to stand for their interests and needs on decisions that influence their lives. An amalgamation of factors has resulted to the positive changes. Quotas have been the appropriate and short term strategy for ensuring women into office.

Although; women have been restricted to lower house in the parliament and much work is yet to be carried out in the upper house in most African Nations. The rise in the number of women in political involvement in the lower house has not positively resulted to the demands of women. Even with Quotas; there has been a slow advancement in maximizing the number of women partaking in formal politics and additional plans are required to tackle this structural challenges. It is vivid that there is an urgent demand to revitalize the patriarchal systems which is attributed to their political spheres thereby restricting the influence of women.

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